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The Russian Invasions of East Prussia

1914-15

THE RUSSIAN INVASIONS OF EAST PRUSSIA, 1914-15

BY

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A. B. University of Illinois, 1916.

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN HISTORY

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1917

1917
L96

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

June 1, 1917

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VISION BY Benjamin Edward Ludvik

ENTITLED The Russian Invasions
in East Prussia, 1914-15

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

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Chapter I Introduction.

When the hour of conflict came on August 1, 1914, there were strikes in progress at St. Petersburg and other Russian cities. Civil discontent was rife, and anxious observers believed that the country was on the verge of another upheaval.¹ To the Germans it seemed that the war would find Russia rent asunder by disorder, but they were doomed to disappointment, as the course of events revealed.

Among her allies, a profound impression of Russias' inexhaustible strength was generally prevalent at the commencement of the great war.² Little consideration was given by the public of London and Paris to her difficulties. The vast weight of the mighty Russian Empire fired the imagination of statesmen, combatants, and populace alike.³ Russia's trials and misfortunes in previous campaigns were instantly forgotten. When it was realized that the whole resources of a state numbering 173,000,000 of people were being thrown into the scale against the Teutonic league, it seemed to many that the war was already won.⁴ The Czar, it was said, was mobilizing millions upon millions of men. Countless hordes of Cossacks, so the wild stories ran, were to sweep across the Prussian plains and thunder against the gates of Berlin. The vision of the conquering Cossack was so universal that fables about trainloads of Cossacks

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 219.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 117.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 201.

4. Ibid., p. 201.

passing thru England on their way to northern France gained widespread currency and had at last to be contradicted officially by the British government.¹ The conviction that Russian armies would rapidly march from triumph to triumph, as they did in the Seven Year's War, was less easy to chasten. The Russian armies were likened to a steam-roller, and the phrase, "the Russian steam-roller" obtained a great vogue in France and England.² The popular impression was that the "steam-roller" would overcome all obstacles and ponderously pursue its way to the Prussian capital without a halt.³

Such thoughts were for the most part mere flights of the fancy, for Russia's difficulties were soon proved to be manifold. She had the men and they flocked in from all parts of the Empire. But she experienced great difficulties in arming such colossal numbers, for there were embarrassing shortages of equipment of every kind, from clothing to guns.

The Russian army had made great progress during the previous decade. Since the disasters in Manchuria it had been transformed out of recognition. The trouble was that equipment was utterly lacking for mobilization on a scale commensurate with the bigness of the country.⁴ The supply of material of war was the crucial problem for Russia from the beginning. The development of Russian industry, satisfactory as had been its progress in recent years, had not attained the capacity of supplying unaided the material required for warfare on such an unprecedented scale, and in particular the

1. The Times History Of The War. V. 3, p. 201.

2. Ibid., p. 201.

3. Ibid., p. 201.

4. The Great War, V. 3, p. 118.

necessary munitions.¹

Next to difficulties of equipment came difficulties of transport. Germany has the most highly developed railroad system for the extent of her territory of any nation in the world.² Not only is every point of any consequence on her French frontier covered by railroads, but all such points on her Russian frontier as well. Her total mileage is about 35,000 miles.³ Russia, with her vast extent of territory has about the same number. Austria has 25,000 miles of railroads, a great deal of which are along her northern frontier, giving her a complete network of transportation in that part.⁴ It is in her railroad system that the great material strength of Germany both for offence and defence is to be found. There are two, and in some places three main railroad lines running all around the frontier by Breslau, Posen, and Thorn, all of which have many connections with central Germany. Breslau has seven different railroads running out of it, and the frontier between Breslau and Cracow is gridironed with lines whose purposes were military rather than economic.⁵ A rapid concentration at any point on the frontier is, therefore, easy for Germany. There were only four lines of railroads actually crossing the frontier from East Prussia into Russia, and one from Ratibor, on the Austrian frontier, to Warsaw, Poland.⁶

The Russian system of railroads is very inferior to the German, or for that matter, to the Austrian. Many of the roads have only

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 118.

2. The World's Work, November 1914, p. 17.

3. Ibid., p. 18.

4. Ibid., p. 18.

5. Ibid., p. 18.

6. Ibid., p. 18.

single lines of track, their construction is inferior, stations wide apart, and speed slower.¹ They cannot carry the same amount of traffic as those of their opponents. The guage of the German and Austrian railroads is the same--4 feet 8½ inches, so that rolling stock can be used interchangeably.² The Russian guage is five feet, so that their equipment cannot be used in Germany and Austria. The Germans had devised a method, however, by which it was possible to extend the distance between the car-wheels along the axles so as to make the altered wheel base fit the Russian guage, in case of a German invasion of Russia.³ The German military machine was designed for dependence upon railways. When the Germans invaded Belgium and France, they found ready to hand an elaborate system of railways almost as complex and as efficient as their own.⁴ When they entered Poland and had to march painfully over an almost roadless land, their efficiency was speedily decreased. Whenever the Germans were cut off from the locomotive, their offensive gradually lost momentum. The Russian soldiers marched to war on their own feet, and bore the hardships of slow progress more successfully.⁵

Another difficulty which greatly hampered Russia was her isolation.⁶ She was everywhere cut off from the open sea save at distant Vladivostok, on the Pacific, where a passage was cut thru the ice during the winter with great difficulty. The Baltic was at once closed to her. After Turkey declared war, the Black Sea was hermet-

1. The World's Work, November, 1914, p. 18.

2. Ibid., p. 18.

3. Ibid., p. 18.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 202.

5. Ibid., p. 202.

6. Ibid., p. 202.

ically sealed for the war. Archangel, was, ordinarily, shut in by ice from October to May, and was in any case inadequately served by rail, though steps were quickly taken to improve the railway line, and, by means of icebreakers, to keep the port open a longer time than usual.¹ Russia needed vast quantities of supplies from her Allies, and for a long time very few of her requirements could be met, save to a small extent thru Vladivostok and Archangel. Russia's troubles did not end here. Her crowning difficulty was the configuration and character of her frontier, to which attention must now be paid.²

The Russian boundary of the Teutonic empires taken as a whole resembles the figure of a capital S turned backwards, with East Prussia filling the upper recess, Russian Poland the lower, and Galicia falling just below the tail.³ As a result of this curious configuration, Poland was thrust like a great broad wedge far into the territory of the Central Powers. From the point where the River Warta crossed from Russian to Prussian ground, the distance to Berlin was only 180 miles. Small wonder that the uninstructed, knowing nothing of Germany's means of defence, dreamed of Russian troops passing down Unter den Linden within a few weeks of the outbreak of the war, thus repeating the old-time tradition of the Seven Year's War.⁴

Poland was in fact, a veritable sorespot for Russia. On the north the provinces of West and East Prussia curved far over Poland.

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 202.

2. Ibid., p. 202-03.

3. The Great War, V. 3, pp. 119-120.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 203.

On the south the Austrian province of Galicia not only enwrapped the whole southern Polish border but it reached the Russian provinces of Volhynia and Podolia, and even touched Bessarabia.¹ Poland was thus a dangerous salient for Russia. A Russian army advancing thru the center of Poland would be threatened on both its flanks. The Teutonic allies could launch their blows from three sides at the heart of Poland, and the remarkable efficiency of their strategical railways enabled them to transfer their forces from one part of the frontier to another with such rapidity and secrecy that it was impossible for the Russians to foresee from what direction a deadly thrust was to be expected.² Therefore, before Russia could think of a march to Berlin, she had to clear her threatened flanks and make sure that she could not be assailed from either East Prussia or Galicia. As was to be expected, instead of marching on Berlin, she found the greater part of the province of Poland overrun by the enemy.³ Her efforts to rid herself of the invaders not only constituted a great part of the first steps of the war; they were, in fact, almost as effective as the process of invading Prussia, which the ignorant expected, because in the long and fierce combats which ensued, Russia was able slowly but persistently to wear down the strength of her opponents.⁴

Let us now examine the frontiers of Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary conjointly. The military and political problems they presented were so interdependent that a correct conception of the position can only be gained by passing in imagination at will across boundaries which were in the main artificial.⁵ The Russian

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 203.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 121.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 203.

4. Ibid., p. 203.

5. Ibid., p. 203.

Baltic provinces of Kovno and Courland are flat plains with scarcely a ridge, and for the most part thinly populated. From a quarter to one third of their whole area was covered with forests, and the impression conveyed in a journey thru them to Petrograd was of an almost empty thickly-wooded land.¹ There was a considerable German population, especially in the towns, and a good deal of the territory was held by magnates of German descent. German influence has for centuries been very marked in western Russia, and the factor thus presented was not without its influence upon the war.²

The noteworthy features of this great plain are its water-courses. The general direction of the rivers is northwards, since they mostly rise in the Carpathians or their foothills and empty into the Baltic Sea.³ Beginning in the east we encounter the Niemen, which runs roughly parallel with the eastern frontier of East Prussia, for a distance of about eighty miles, between the Russian fortresses Grodno and Kovno. Along that stretch its average distance from the Prussian frontier is about fifty miles. Bending to the west after passing Kovno, the Niemen penetrates the Prussian boundary, where it is about 500 yards wide, and reaches the Baltic Sea as the German Memel.⁴ This long strip of territory between the Niemen and East Prussia was destined to be the scene of much desperate fighting during the first few months of the war. It is a wild and desolate

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 203.

2. Ibid., p. 204. The recent revolution in Russia, March, 1917, is said to have been directed for the most part, against the German influence which surrounded the Russian court.

3. The Great War, V. 3, p. 120.

4. Ibid., p. 120.

land; full of forests, small lakes, and marshes.¹ Its southern half was nearly filled up by the great forest of Augustovo, in the midst of which stood the town of Suwalki. The whole strip was classified as Poland, and Napoleon knew it well, for the bulk of the Grand Army traversed it, and crossed the Niemen at Kovno and Grodno in 1812.² It was in this very forest, as will be seen, that the Russian army made its stand after the catastrophe at Tannenberg and forced the Germans into retreat towards their own border. It should be understood that the whole of the fighting in this region turned upon the repeated German attempts to make good the passage of the Niemen.³ The statement that in this area the Niemen was the natural frontier of Russia was not an idle one. The river was of the utmost value to Russia, for among other things, it protected in part the vital main line of railway from Petrograd to Warsaw.⁴

The Vistula, by far the largest and most important river of this region, rising in the Carpathians, flows by Cracow and reaches Warsaw by a long sweeping curve to the left, after forming the northern boundary of Galicia thruout a third of this section of its course.⁵ Just below Warsaw, the Vistula turns westward and reaches the German boundary, after flowing in a generally northwestern direction, about twelve miles above the fortress of Thorn. Then traversing West Prussia it empties into the Gulf of Dantzig. As the Niemen dominated strategy farther north, so the Vistula was the chief factor of

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 204.

2. Ibid., p. 204.

3. Ibid., p. 204.

4. Ibid., p. 205. See also The World's Work, November 1914, pp. 19-21.

5. The Great War, V. 3, p. 120.

strategy in the centre of Poland. The Germans were astride its lower reaches; but where the river curved southward at Warsaw it presented an obstacle athwart the line of German advance which was to stand Russia in good stead.¹ The Vistula had important tributaries: the San, approaching it from the right near the point where it leaves the Galician boundary; and the Bug, also from the right, eighteen miles below Warsaw, after this latter tributary has been swelled by the waters of the Narev, which empties into it on the right.² The Bug rises in eastern Galicia and flows thru Brest Litovsk, 150 miles east of Warsaw, where there was an immense military depot protected by a ring of forts, the main base of supplies for all Russian operations in Poland.³ East of Brest Litovsk there is a large tract of almost impenetrable country, the Pripet marshes, one of a number of such swampy areas in Russia, which are a consequence and characteristic of the ill-defined water-partings.⁴ The Narev with its tributary the Bobr and the frequent marshes along their course are an important defensive feature of the region opposite the southeastern frontier of East Prussia.⁵

Across the border lay East Prussia, the idolized province of the Prussian Junkers. Just as in the north the object of Germany was to negotiate the passage of the Niemen, so the very first object of the Russians was to drive out the German garrisons, which were believed to be weak. East Prussia was the most bleak and dreary of the Ger-

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 207.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 120.

3. Ibid., p. 120-21.

4. Ibid., p. 121.

5. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 205.

man provinces.¹ It was part of the great plain which sloped down to the sand dunes of the Baltic Sea. Great quantities of rye and potatoes were grown on its open lands, but its chief characteristic, which played such an important role in the battles to come, was found in the almost impenetrable tangle of lakes and woods and swamps in the south-eastern portion, all along the Russian frontier.² This region is called the Masurian Lake region, or more accurately, as Masuria. This area was really a continuation of the Russian strip within the angle of the Niemen, but it constituted even more difficult country for military operations, and was believed to form a more useful defence of German territory than any artillery position.³ A scheme for draining and cultivating it had been prudently rejected on military grounds. It was protected by a system of blockhouses, and there were garrisons in the various small towns in its recesses, while the Germans had not neglected to endow it with several of the railway lines upon which they so greatly leaned.⁴

It is now necessary to explain in detail the fortified positions prepared in this area by the Russians and Germans. Although the latter power depended in the main on its armies and splendid equipment of railways, it had by no means neglected the construction of modern strongholds--to support its defence and serve as a basis for offensive operations.⁵ The principal fortress in East Prussia was "Königsberg, the second capital of Prussia situated on the River Pregel. It possessed an inner and outer line of works, beyond which

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 205.

2. Ibid., p. 205.

3. Ibid., p. 205.

4. Ibid., p. 205.

5. The Great War, V. 3, p. 122.

were twelve detached forts, six on each side of the Pregel. In addition, there were two other large and powerful forts, that of Friedrichsburg, on an island in the river, to the west of the city, and the Kaserne Kronprinz, within the ramparts on the eastern side.¹

Königsberg ranked as a first-class fortress, and was the headquarters of the first Army Corps. It lies far within the great Frische Lagoon, on a wooded peninsula, with a steep and forbidding coast.² On the long spit of land forming the seaward side of the lagoon, lies the entrenched camp of Pillau, twenty-nine miles from Königsberg.³ The whole Königsberg area required to be treated with great respect, and when the Russians first invaded East Prussia, they only sought to mask the fortress. The only other important protective feature in East Prussia was the Masurian region, which formed a natural means of defence.

On the line of the Lower Vistula, in the province of East Prussia, there were other powerful fortresses. Dantzic, at the mouth of the river, was a first-class fortress and entrenched camp, and its approaches could be inundated on the eastern side.⁴ There were powerful works opposite Dirschau, twenty miles to the south, forming a bridgehead guarding the main line to Königsberg and Petrograd.⁵ About forty-five miles farther south was the strong fortress of Graudenz, on the right bank of the Vistula, forming another valuable bridgehead. At a point ninety-two miles south of Dantzic, and twelve miles from the Russian frontier at Alexandrowo, stood

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 213.

2. Ibid., p. 213.

3. Ibid., p. 214.

4. Ibid., p. 214.

5. Ibid., p. 214.

Thorn, a fortress which was one of the main defences of eastern Germany.¹ The town was on the right bank of the Vistula, but both banks were fortified. There was the usual circle of detached forts, eight on the right bank and five on the left.² Thorn has been the most important German fortress for the operations in the eastern theatre during the present war, although it has never once been attacked. Thorn was the pivot for von Hindenburg's railway strategy and one of the bases from which he delivered his repeated blows against Warsaw in the autumn of 1914.³ Thorn and Dantzig have been compared to Metz and Strassburg, and have been described as "bastions, as it were, commanding the curtain between them."⁴ The whole Lower Vistula, was, in short, very strongly held.

Below Thorn there was much marsh country on both sides of the frontier, but at the point where the valley of the Warta entered Prussian territory, the need for artificial protection again began.⁵ Accordingly the great artificial railway centre of Posen, which stood on an open sandy plain, was provided with an immense entrenched camp, which had to be reckoned with by any large army marching due west from Warsaw on Berlin.⁶ South of Posen there were yet more marsh lands. An inner line of defence possessed by Eastern Germany was the line of the Oder, which could, however, be easily crossed by an invading army in its upper reaches in Silesia.⁷ Strong garrisons

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 214.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 122.

3. Ibid., p. 122.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 214.

5. Ibid., p. 214.

6. Ibid., p. 214.

7. Ibid., p. 214.

were maintained at Oppeln and Breslau, but these places had few modern fortifications. There was a big entrenched camp at Neisse, on the northern side of the Sudetic mountains.¹ The principal obstacle to an advance down the Oder was the fortress of Glogau, to the northwest of Breslau. Glogau had been a fortress for centuries, and was partly built on an island and partly on the left bank of the Oder. Its fortifications were extensive, for it was an important railway junction.² The remaining fortified positions on the line of the Oder were Küstrin, fifty-two miles east of Berlin, the last shield of the capital; and Stettin, near the mouth of the river.³ It may be said that the true defences of the eastern frontier of Germany were provided by its incomparable system of strategic railways, which again and again enabled von Hindenburg to concentrate large forces quickly and secretly at various points from which his blows were launched like thunderbolts.⁴ Besides Brest Litovsk, the Russians had two very strongly fortified positions in Poland, Ivangorod, sixty-four miles southeast of Warsaw, and Novo Georgievsk at the confluence of the Bug and the Vistula.⁵ Warsaw, though not entirely without defences, was practically an open town. Warsaw was the railway centre of Poland, but the fortified zone on which it relied was created eighteen miles away at Novo Georgievsk.⁶ It was the usual circle of detached forts, and was exactly 120 miles from Thorn. Further protection was given by extensive marshes and woods extending

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 214.

2. Ibid., p. 214-15.

3. Ibid., p. 215.

4. Ibid., p. 215.

5. The Great War, V. 3, p. 123.

6. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 216.

for a long way from the left bank of the Vistula.¹ As an additional protection the Russians constructed an elaborate entrenched line between the Bzura and Warsaw. This series of entrenched positions, which came to be known as the Blonie line, from the village thru which it passed, was about eighteen miles due west of Warsaw.² Ivan-gorod was an entrenched camp sixty-four miles southeast of Warsaw, at the junction of the River Wieprz with the Vistula. It had nine forts on the right bank and three on the left, and it was near Ivangorod that von Hindenburg's initial attempt to seize the line of the Vistula first broke down.³ About 150 miles to the east of Warsaw, on the River Bug, was Brest Litovsk, an immense supply depot--ringed with forts, which was the real base of Russian preparations in Poland. Warsaw, Novo Georgievsk, Ivangorod, and Brest Litovsk were sometimes described as the "Polish Quadrilateral," but Warsaw had no pretensions to the strength of the other places.⁴

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 216.

2. Ibid., p. 216.

3. Ibid., p. 216.

4. Ibid., p. 216.

Chapter II

The First Russian Invasion Of East Prussia.

Germany underestimated the marvelous rapidity of the Russian mobilization. It was commonly believed that it would take at least six or seven weeks to mobilize Russia's vast numbers. In accordance with this belief, the German General Staff undertook the invasion of France via Belgium, contrary to the treaty of 1839 which guaranteed forever Belgium's neutrality. Whatever the facts of the case may be, Germany deemed it necessary for her very existence to get at France by the easiest route, and crush her before she was fully mobilized.¹ When France should be brought to her knees, then the whole weight of Germany's might could be used against Russia.

As we have observed, it was the intention of the Germanic powers to hold the Russians in check as far as possible until the fate of France had been sealed.² In accordance with this view it was decided to send the greater portion of the German army to the western front, leaving only a thin line of troops to guard East Prussia; most of these were Landwehr and reserve formations. Austria was to invade Russia and paralyze the available forces. It was believed that such a movement would be facilitated by revolutionary outbreaks in Poland, which the central powers confidently expected at the opening of the

1. It has been suggested by numerous writers that Germany would have done better by attacking Russia first and then France. This would have done away with the famous "scraps of paper" incident, which was universally condemned.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 124.

war.¹ However the most they could reasonably count upon was to keep the Russians in check until France had been accounted for.

But the Germans were sadly disappointed in their expectations, for the speed with which Russia mobilized surpassed the expectations of the outside world. The Austrian raiders were speedily repelled and driven back into their own territory.² Strong armies were sent into Galicia in order to clear the southern flanks of Poland, and a brilliant series of Russian victories followed, which culminated in the capture of Lemberg in September. Cracow, the goal of the Russian ambition, was never reached, although the Russians threatened it seriously.

From the very beginning Russia experienced great difficulty in arming, drilling, and clothing her millions. The actual mobilization was a brilliant piece of work. Men came from all parts of the empire, eager to give their lives for the Czar. Mr. Stephen Graham, an American writer, was in an Altai village on the Mongolian frontier, and relates what happened when the order for mobilization arrived on July 31. The men knew nothing whatever of any trouble, and had not even been told against whom they were going to fight. Practically the whole male population cheerfully saddled their ponies, and made their way to the Siberian railroad, 1200 versts away.³ Russian factories worked feverishly to supply the necessary supplies and munitions. Japan furnished huge quantities of warlike goods, and heavy purchases were made from neutrals.⁴ Russia was particularly handicapped by a shortage of big gun ammunition, a difficulty which

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 217.

2. Ibid., p. 218.

3. Stephen Graham--Russia And The World, pp. 1-4.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 219.

soon hampered all the belligerents. However these obstacles were to a great degree overcome, and it was calculated that by April, 1915, Russia would be near her maximum strength.¹

The war brought a solidarity to the Russian nation such as it had never known before. Never had Russia been so united. Just before the war, strikes were in progress in many Russian cities.² Civil discontent was rife, and it was commonly believed, especially by the Germans, that Russia was on the verge of another revolution, such as she had experienced during the Russo-Japanese War. At the outbreak of war, the strikes at Petrograd vanished in a night, and the Cossacks who had been brought into the city to preserve order in the Nevsky Prospekt and other main thoroughfares found themselves acclaimed by the populace. One of them was heard to say to a comrade. "Is it possible that these people are cheering us, or am I dreaming?"³ The Russian people clamoured for war, and when it was known that Germany had proclaimed hostilities, immense throngs knelt in front of the Winter Palace, and sang the Russian National Anthem. For the first time in a century, a Tzar of Russia could mingle among his subjects without a guard.⁴ In the Russo-Japanese War some of the Russian regiments had to be driven into the troop trains at the point of the bayonet.⁵ The war of 1914 was a popular war, and the Russian troops marched off to the front with songs on their lips.

But the most startling change was the treatment of the liquor question. With one stroke of the pen by the Tzar, Russia became a

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 219.

2. Ibid., p. 219.

3. Ibid., p. 219.

4. Ibid., p. 222.

5. Ibid., p. 222.

"dry" nation, first, during the period of mobilization, and later, for the duration of the war.¹ The imperial edict transformed the morals of Russia, and although it cost the Russian exchequer a loss of about \$340,000,000, the loss could be easily spared, because of increased efficiency and increase in savings. Vodka was as acceptable to the Russian peasant as strawberries and cream with us. The decree was enforced to the letter, and it was accepted without complaint. "The result was," wrote an observer, "that the army and the people were serious and sober when they faced the task imposed upon them. Rioting and dissipation were things of the past, both at the front, and in the capital."² Such was the situation in Russia at the outbreak of the war.

Since the Russo-Japanese War, the Russians have learned valuable lessons, and have reorganized their armies on a large scale, much credit for this having been given to General Sukhomlinoff, some times called the Russian Kitchener.³ Early in 1914 it was announced that Russia would adopt an offensive strategy in the next European war.⁴ This policy was followed to the letter on all the fronts. Formerly it was the Russian policy to retire before the invader, who was to be dealt with by "Generals January and February,"⁵ as Napoleon found out to his everlasting sorrow. The Russians were aware of the fact that

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 222.

2. Ibid., p. 222.

3. The London Times, August 25, 1914, 5 e. When the Russian revolution of March, 1917, occurred, it was affirmed that General Sukhomlinoff was a traitor to his country, the charge being that he allowed the troops to go without arms, while he reaped the profits.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 223.

5. Ibid., p. 223.

the Germans had underestimated their mobilization by at least three weeks, and what was of more importance, they knew that the Germans were bent upon securing an early decision in France, and in pursuance of that policy, had posted only small forces of troops in East Prussia. It was deemed advisable, therefore, to strike at the heart of Junkerdom, and, at the same time, to relieve the pressure which was being exercised upon the French by the onrushing Germans. Three railways which cross the frontier from Russia into East Prussia determined the general course of the Russian invasion on three converging lines.¹ The first was the great trunk road from Petrograd to Berlin, which crossed the River Niemen at the fortress of Kovno, passed the frontier at Wirballen and Eydtkuhnen, and traversed the province thru Insterburg, Allenstein, and Eylau to Thorn. The second, and least important of the three, left the main Vilna-Warsaw line at Bialystok, passed the minor fortress of Osowiec, crossed the frontier beyond Grajevo, and at Lyck entered the intricate lake country, and continued to Königsberg. The third line ran from Warsaw to Mlawa, and continued thru Eylau to Dantzig.² The frontier nowhere presented formidable obstacles, nor did the Germans take any pains to fortify it. It was a purely conventional line, which marked the political division of the area between the Niemen and the Vistula. Nature knew nothing of it, and on either side stretched the same flat expanses of heath and forest, of lake and swamp, varied by fertile fields in which rye and potatoes were grown.³ The intricate chains of lakes were a formidable obstacle to an invasion. Artificial obstacles existed only in the shape of two small forts (Boyen and Lyck) command-

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 124.

2. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 224.

3. Ibid., p. 224.

ing defiles among the Masurian Lakes.¹ Although Königsberg was an important fortress, it was so situated that it did not interfere with the occupation of the greater part of the province.²

Two Russian armies were sent into East Prussia along two main routes.³ The First, or Vilna Army concentrated behind the Niemen, and had its bases at the fortresses of Kovno and Grodno. The Second, or Warsaw Army concentrated behind the River Narev. It detached a portion of its forces to penetrate the Masurian Lakes by Bialla and Lyck, but its main line of advance was by Mława-Soldau. These armies were commanded by Generals Samsonoff and Rennenkampf.

Paul von Rennenkampf is perhaps one of the most competent generals in the Russian service. He distinguished himself in the Boxer Rebellion and in the Russo-Japanese War. The Chinese called him the "Tiger General." In the war against Japan, he was almost the only Russian general who distinguished himself. The Japanese set a price of 20,000 Roubles upon his head. The name indicates that Rennenkampf is of German origin. Rennenkampf was born in 1852. In 1870 he joined the Russian army. In 1873 he became an officer (he received his training in a Junker School in Helsingfors.) In 1895 he became a colonel, and in 1899 he became chief of staff of the Trans-Baikal district. As major general he went into the Boxer Rebellion, as cavalry general in^{to} the Japanese war, in which he would have had greater success if the jealousy of Kuropatkin had not curtailed his field of action. In 1913 the Tzar appointed him commanding general

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 224.

2. Ibid., p. 224.

3. Ibid., p. 225.

of the entire Vilna district, which comprised four army corps.¹

General Samsonoff was born in 1859. He had become well known, and like Rennenkampf, had made his reputation in Manchuria where he commanded a division of Siberian Cossacks. Up to the outbreak of the war, he had spent most of his time in Turkestan.²

The Narev Army under General Samsonoff was the first to encounter a large force of the enemy, and it will be convenient to consider its march separately, bearing in mind that it was engaged in a concerted and converging invasion, in which it was all important to secure the proper timing of the move from the east with the move from the south.³ It was ordered to move westward along the main railway line connecting Petrograd and Berlin, which penetrates the East Prussian boundary at Eydtkuhnen.⁴ It was a complete army composed of the Second, Third, Fourth, and Twelfth Army Corps of the active army, and the Third and Fourth Reserve Divisions, and five cavalry divisions.⁵ Its numerical strength must have been of about 250,000 men. The early days of the campaign, while mobilization continued, were

1. This account is taken from Der Völkerring, V. 2, pp. 41-2. General Rennenkampf is no longer in favor; he was removed from command by the Grand Duke Nicholas in August, 1915, for incompetence, and went into private life. He was seen by Stanley Washburn just before the recent revolution, and he suggested that Rennenkampf would most likely be incarcerated or executed by the revolutionists. See The Chicago Tribune, March, 25, 1917, 8 a.

2. Ibid., p. 41.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 225.

4. The Great War, V. 3, p. 125.

5. Ibid., p. 125.

employed in cavalry raids and reconnaissances.¹ The long established popular tradition of the ruthless cruelty of the Cossacks was one of the chief causes for the general panic and exodus of a large number of the inhabitants at the approach of the Russian cavalry, which scoured the country far and wide. The consternation and flight of the inhabitants was not unlike the havoc occasioned by the inroads of the Germans into Belgium at precisely the same time.²

The general advance may be said to have begun on August 16, the seventeenth day of the Russian mobilization.³ On the 17th the Russian van encountered the German 1st (Königsberg) Army Corps, which fought a delaying action at Stallupönen. The Germans claim to have taken 3000 prisoners, but on the next day they retired on Gumbinnen.⁴ Here was fought the first important battle of this campaign. The Russian advance covered a front of about thirty-five miles, from Pilkallen on the north to Goldap on the south.⁵ The centre followed the line of the main road and railway from Stallupönen to Gumbinnen. The ground was flat and nearly featureless, a country of rye and potato fields, with scattered farmhouses, little villages, and wind-mills. The Russian left had to clear and traverse the pine woods which stretch for many a mile east and north of the important railway junction of Goldap.⁶ The Russians outnumbered the Germans by at least five to three. The main battle was fought on the 20th before Gumbinnen. It is a picturesque country town, with many fine old

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 225.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 126.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 226.

4. Borkowski, Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, p. 190.

5. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 226.

6. Ibid., p. 226.

gabled houses, dating from the early 18th century, when it was colonized by Austrian Protestant refugees from Salzburg. It had 14,000 inhabitants, and was twenty-two miles distant from the Russian border.¹ General Rennenkampf, having a numerical superiority, attacked the enemy's centre with a frontal attack. The fighting was hotly contested, and some of the trenches changed hands several times. The fighting lasted fourteen hours, and it was only at midnight that the Germans withdrew. The wings, however, held out longer, and retook Pillkallen, but they were eventually expelled by superior Russian forces.² The Russians took 400 prisoners and twelve field guns.³ The Germans retired to Insterburg, which was an important railway centre, the junction of lines to Königsberg, Tilsit, Goldap, and above all the key of the vital south-western line to Allenstein and Thorn. It was a dignified country town, with a fine market square, and about twice the population of Gumbinnen (31,000.)⁴ A notice posted in Insterburg stated that the German troops must "obey a superior order to march elsewhere," but told the inhabitants that the Russians could hardly arrive within a week and counselled them to remain in their houses and welcome the invaders with "hospitality."⁵ The Russians entered Insterburg on the 24th. The Russian left wing pressed in from Goldap to Darkehnen, and southwards to Angerburg, on the edge of the lake country. Thence it followed the cross-country strategical railway

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 226.

2. Ibid., p. 226.

3. See the German account in Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, p. 36, and Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, pp. 190-1. The Germans claim to have taken 8000 prisoners and 10 guns.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 226.

5. Ibid., p. 228.

Nordenburg-Gerdauen-Allenburg. On the north it held Tilsit, and the Tilsit-Königsberg railway as far as Labiau.¹ The Russians never invested or isolated Königsberg, although their cavalry advanced beyond Targiau on the railway line from Eydtkuhnen.² The Russian prospects were extremely good, considering that the only considerable force in this portion of East Prussia had been defeated, and no longer ventured to give battle. Moreover the retirement of General von Francois from Insterburg had been hasty, and the road to Königsberg was littered with quantities of abandoned material.³

On August 25, General Schleideman of the 2nd Russian Army Corps posted up the following interesting manifesto.⁴ It reads as follows:

"We representatives of Russia, turn to you Prussians, as heralds of the great united Slavic states, with words of reason. Stop, you insensible ones, before it is too late! Look about you: the whole world is in arms against you, who are disturbing the world peace! Russia, France, England, Servia, Montenegro, the Belgians called forth to defence by you, and even Japan--all are in arms against you, as against wild Huns, to defend their lands against your invasion. Your ally Italy has forsaken you. Great suffering hangs over your heads! The Slavic nations from the East, the united Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Belgians from the West cling around you with an iron grasp. The German government in blind enthusiasm, deceives its own people, who look about them in mortal fear. Where are your victories before Lüttich? Where are your laurels against France? Where the Russian revolution and strikes? All these are Utopias! In the West

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 228.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 127.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 228.

4. Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, pp. 191-2.

and in the East, you are losing battle upon battle. This is kept strictly from you. All Russia rose to a man for the common Slavic cause, and will not lay down its sword, until this fight has been fought to the finish. We bring you future freedom for quiet, cultured and productive work; throw your useless weapons away, and don't shed blood uselessly. The Russian is magnanimous, and peace loving; we will not take revenge for your barbarous carnage at Kalisch, and Ezenstochen, and your oppression of the peacefully working people. We are fighting against the German army and not against the German people. The Poles living in Germany are our Slavic kinsmen. Be unafraid! Your families, wives, and children, your house and home will not be molested by us. We suggest to the peace loving population that they conduct themselves peacefully and offer our hand to them. Lay down your arms, which were forced into your hands by your government! Surrender! The Russians are friendly to prisoners and deal mildly with them. A prisoner is no longer an enemy to us. We do not massacre wounded people."¹

Meanwhile the Narev Army had invaded East Prussia from the south-east. This army was under the command of General Samsonoff, and its total strength was about 250,000.² General Samsonoff had to operate in a much more difficult country, the region of the Masurian Lakes. His advance was along three lines.³

(1) North-west by the Warsaw-Mlawa-Soldau railway;

(2) To Lyck by the Osowiec line, and thence by a detour south of the larger lakes to Johannisburg.

1. Der Völkerring, V. 2, pp. 43-44, which comments as follows:

"We shall see how mild the Russian rule was."

2. Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, p. 191.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 228.

(3) To Lyck, and thence by a still wider detour above Lake Spirding.

Thus the army of General Samsonoff was spread out over a very broad front where communication and cooperation was rendered especially difficult.

The Twentieth Army Corps and some Landwehr formations opposed the march of the Narev Army, particularly the right wing.¹ A series of retreating battles now ensued, which culminated with the battle of Frankenau. This was a hard fought battle and was won by the numerical superiority of the Russians.² The retreat of the Germans to Osterode was hasty, and they were forced to abandon a large quantity of war material. On the same day that Rennenkampf entered Insterburg (the 24th) Samsonoff had broken the resistance of the weak forces which opposed his progress. His cavalry swung around by Sinsburg and Bischofsburg, and as far as Rotfliess, a junction station on the main line, from which a branch line ran up to Königsberg.³ The Russians also occupied Allenstein, an important junction point on the main from Berlin via Thorn to Insterburg and Eydtkuhnen.⁴ General Rennenkampf's front was now on the line Friedland-Angerburg, and the cavalry of the two Russian armies had nearly established contact.⁵ It would not take long for the two armies, aggregating 500,000 men, to unite their forces and inflict a great defeat upon Germany, which under the circumstances would be disastrous. The progress of the Russian offensive, particularly the advance of the Narev army, unless immediately

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 128.

2. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 228.

3. Ibid., p. 228.

4. The Great War, V. 3, p. 129.

5. Ibid., p. 129.

arrested, would in a few days have cut off the army of von Francois, isolated Königsberg, swept the Germans from all of East Prussia east of the Vistula,¹ and then who knows what might have happened to Germany once the Russians were beyond the Lakes and on the high road to Berlin.

On Tuesday, August 25th, the day when the British forces in the west were struggling out of the trap at Maubeuge, the high-water mark of the Russian invasion of East Prussia was reached.² Russian cavalry had penetrated almost to the Lower Vistula, driving before them crowds of anxious refugees. The evidence appears to show that the Russian troops behaved themselves in the towns and cities, for as a rule the Russian officers insisted upon strict discipline. Naturally there were transgressions by individual soldiers, who were executed when apprehended.³ The German peasants, however, fled from their own terror of the Cossacks, and did not realize that the Cossacks of today are disciplined regular troops, but remembered only wild tales of the ragged spearmen who had ridden thru their land a hundred years ago, and had made little distinction between German allies and French opponents.⁴ With stories of universal burnings and slaughters, the peasants and gentry alike fled over the Vistula, and brought news to Berlin that East Prussia was in the grip of the invader.⁵

It was not until after the defeat at Gumbinnen that the Germans began to take the danger to East Prussia seriously. They were ab-

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 124.

2. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 2, p. 108.

3. See Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, pp. 44-48, for an interesting account of the Russian occupation of East Prussian cities.

4. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 2, p. 108.

5. Ibid., pp. 108-110.

sorbed in their offensive in France, and had left only five corps of the active army (the 1st, 20th, 17th, 5th, and 6th) to operate on the entire Eastern Front, and of these the 6th (Breslau) was sent to help the hard pressed Austrians in Galicia, and only two, the 1st and 20th) were at this moment available in East Prussia.¹ By August 22d the German Staff had become convinced that drastic measures were required to cope with the alarming situation in East Prussia. A dispatch from the Kaiser summoned General von Hindenburg to take command in the East, a man sixty-seven years of age, who was as little known in his own country as many other commanders who have great distinction in this Great War.² On Sunday, the 23d, von Hindenburg reached his headquarters at Marienburg, a fortress town near the Vistula, on the extreme edge of the invaded province. He arrived when the German fortunes were at their lowest ebb, and the story of how within a week he turned the tide and achieved one of the most decisive victories in this war makes a brilliant page even in the rich military history of Germany.³

Paul von Hindenburg (Paul Ludwig Hans Anton von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg) was born in Posen in 1847. He came of a typical Prussian family, and for two centuries his ancestors had served the State, as officers and officials. Their estate was at Neudeck in West Prussia, on the edge of the very province which he was called upon to save.⁴ The traditions of the family are described in an engaging biography by the General's younger brother. They were based on that curious amalgam of piety, loyalty, and militarism which was

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 231.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 129.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 231.

4. Ibid., p. 231.

the moral foundation of the Prussian "Junker Class."¹ Von Hindenburg began his career as a lieutenant at Sadowa, where he received a slight wound. He took part in the battles of St. Privat and Sedan and in the operations before Paris in 1870. Later he attended the war academy. While serving on the staff of a division at Königsberg during the years 1881-1883 he became fascinated with the problem of turning the Masurian Lakes into a bulwark for the defence of East Prussia against a possible Russian invasion.² This subject became at once his occupation and his pastime. He was obsessed by it. He explored every nook and corner of this bewildering region. Later, when called to the General Staff and to the professorship of applied tactics in the War Academy, von Hindenburg had an excellent opportunity to develop his favorite theme in the course of his lectures. Some of his colleagues regarded his apparent infatuation with good-natured ridicule.³

The Munich *Neueste Nachrichten* gives the following interesting outline of Hindenburg in his life work.⁴

"Two opposing views have been held for decades past in military circles on the subject of the marshy region which includes the Masurian Lakes. One was that of General Hindenburg, that the Russians must be forced into the lakes. The other was that the Russians must be kept away from them at all costs. The majority was against Hindenburg, who, however, clung obstinately to the 'mistake of his life.' Hindenburg was in command of a corps in the provinces when he heard that the idea had been mooted for the drainage and cultiva-

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 231.

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 129.

3. Ibid., pp. 129-30.

4. Quoted from The Literary Digest, November 14, 1914, pp. 948-9

tion of these invaluable marshes.

"The old General hastened to Berlin where he explained, protested, and agitated. When his cause seemed hopeless, he went to the Emperor. There he pleaded so effectively that his Majesty promised that his lakes should not be touched. Each year Hindenburg was sent to maneuvers, in the district where the lakes lay. There, as at all maneuvers, the soldiers of one army had a white ribbon in their caps and the other army had a red one. The reds were the Russians, and the whites, always commanded by Hindenburg, had to defend East Prussia. When the reds knew they were going to fight Hindenburg, they said, until the saying became proverbial, 'today we shall have a bath.' They knew that everything they could do was unavailing, the end was always the same: Hindenburg entangled them hopelessly in the Masurian Lakes. This was repeated year by year. With the signal to break off the maneuvers the red army was invariably standing up to its neck in water.

"Then the General was pensioned.(1911) He spent all his summer holidays among the lakes. He borrowed from Königsberg a gun with its normal gun carriage, and had it dragged, from morning to night, out of one pool into another. He measured how deeply a cannon of a certain size sank in the mire; he ascertained how many horses were required to drag a cannon over fairly solid ground, and discovered swamps out of which not even twenty horses could extricate a gun. He noted, he measured, he calculated, he drew plans. The rest is known." He soon became the idol of Germany, but there were many who thought that a greater general than Hindenburg was the brilliant Chief of Staff, General von Ludendorff.

Ludendorff is Germany's man of mystery, the grim, inscrutable, silent man whose picture is on sale in every shop, whose name is in every mouth, but whose personality is hidden even from his own

countrymen.¹

Ludendorff is Hindenburg's indispensable right-hand man. When Hindenburg took command of the Eastern front in mid-August, 1914, Ludendorff was rushed from Liège to Hindenburg's headquarters on the eastern frontier. Since then the two have become inseparable.² There are those who say that Ludendorff is Hindenburg's brain, and that Hindenburg's greatest successes have been planned by his silent, retiring assistant. Hindenburg, when in the mood, becomes very talkative and chatty, and at such times he often attributes his success to his assistant.³ There is perfect harmony between them; Ludendorff plans and Hindenburg decides.

Ludendorff as a strategist was a disciple of Count Schlieffen, whose motto was, "Annihilate the enemy."⁴ He also sympathizes with his chief, Hindenburg. "You can't make war sentimentally," says Hindenburg. "The more mercilessly you make war, the more merciful you are in reality, for so you end the war the sooner. The most humane method of waging war is and remains that which brings peace most quickly."⁵ Evidently Hindenburg is in accord with the German War-Book which declares that the provisions of the Hague convention are nothing but "Sentimentalität und weichele Gefühlsschwärmerei," or in other words, to carry on war in a humane manner would be but flabby emotionalism.⁶

Outside of Germany the fame has been Hindenburg's, at home his

1. Swore, Herbert Bayard, Inside The German Empire, 1916, p. 210.
2. Ibid., p. 210.
3. Ibid., p. 211.
4. Ibid., p. 220.
5. Ibid., p. 220.
6. Morgan, The German War Book, p. 7.

is the name which commands the applause of the crowds; but these who know do not speak of one without the other. "Hindenburg and Ludendorff," they say. No man knows what share of the glory belongs to the silent, hard-working strategist who pores over the maps and orders by day and night and what share to the big man of action.¹

The strategical problem that confronted Hindenburg was, with very limited forces, and those largely composed of second line formations, to beat two armies which had nearly united, each of them equal to his own numbers.² Unless Hindenburg could defeat each army in detail before they were united, the Russians would be in a position to defeat any attempt that Hindenburg had in mind. He proceeded without delay to concentrate all the available German forces scattered thruout this region. An uninterrupted procession of troop trains day and night taxed the capacity of the main line from Thorn to Osterode, as far as the railway could be safely operated under German control.³ Hindenburg's available resources in men were very limited. The 1st and 20th Army Corps were reinforced from the neighboring fortresses, and in all Hindenburg was able to scrape up an army of about 140,000.⁴ Hindenburg had to work quickly, for every moment was precious, since if Rennenkampf should unite his forces with those of his colleague, the Germans might suffer an appalling disaster.⁵ Just at this time the dash upon Paris was entering upon its final stage, and the withdrawal of large forces from the Western

1. Swope, Inside The German Empire 1916, p. 224.

2. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 233.

3. The Great War, V. 3, p. 131.

4. Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, p. 196. The London Times estimates Hindenburg's army at 160,000 men.

5. The Great War, V. 3, p. 131.

Theatre, which would have been absolutely indispensable if the Germans had suffered an overwhelming defeat in the East, would have been fatal to their whole campaign.¹ Everything depended upon the chances for victory in East Prussia and upon the skill of a single man.

A theory grew up that Hindenburg drew his army largely from the Western Front, and the estimates of the number of corps which were sent to him from Belgium rose steadily from one to five or even seven.² These corps were never named or identified. The theory was based on the statement, definitely made and published at the time, that on Friday night, the 28th, German troops were seen entraining in Belgium for the East. At that moment Tannenberg was virtually won. If these reinforcements (whatever their extent) were destined for East Prussia, rather than Galicia or Poland, they must have arrived at a later stage, when the Germans had already crossed the Russian frontier. The probabilities are heavily against this theory.³

Hindenburg handled his tactical problem as skilfully as he had conceived his broad strategical plan. The Russians were overconfident, and because of their recent successes against an inferior force, they became careless and scattered their forces. Samsonoff, misled by his success, conceived an ambitious scheme. Pressing on towards Allenstein, he decided to continue his advance thru the western lake region, and seize the crossings of the Vistula, his chief objective being, apparently, the second-class fortress of Graudenz between Dantzic and Thorn.⁴ His right was directed upon Osterode, while his

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 131.

2. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 233.

3. Ibid., p. 233. The German reports do not mention any reinforcements from the Western frontier.

4. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 2, p. 115.

left was farther south along the railway from Soldau to Ortelsburg.¹ The nature of the ground made his advance strategically dangerous, inasmuch as he was compelled to move on a broad front, since the roads running between the lakes and the swamps made it impossible to deploy large bodies of men on a single line of march. His columns were thus temporarily divided from each other, but he evidently considered that each of them was strong enough to push aside any force that was likely to impede its progress.²

Samsonoff made the mistake of his life when he failed to occupy the good road from Osterode to Soldau, and what was more important, the two railways which fed Soldau from Eylau, Graudenz, and Thorn. Hindenburg's first step was to occupy this road (much of it concealed by forest) and to make himself master of Soldau junction. This line was gained on Wednesday, the 26th, only three days after Hindenburg had assumed the command.³

Von Hindenburg's defeat of Samsonoff recalls very plainly the crushing of the Roman army on the plain of Cannae in 216 B. C. which afterward became proverbial. To Professor Hans Delbrück is due the clearest and most consistent analysis of this very famous battle of antiquity, and on the basis of his able interpretation, Count von Schlieffer, formerly Chief of the German General Staff, once declared that Cannae was the prototype of the kind of plan which should be the ideal for the modern commander. We may assume, therefore, that Professor Delbrück's explanation of the Battle of Cannae was current in higher military circles in Germany.⁴

1. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 2, p. 115.

2. Ibid., p. 115.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 234.

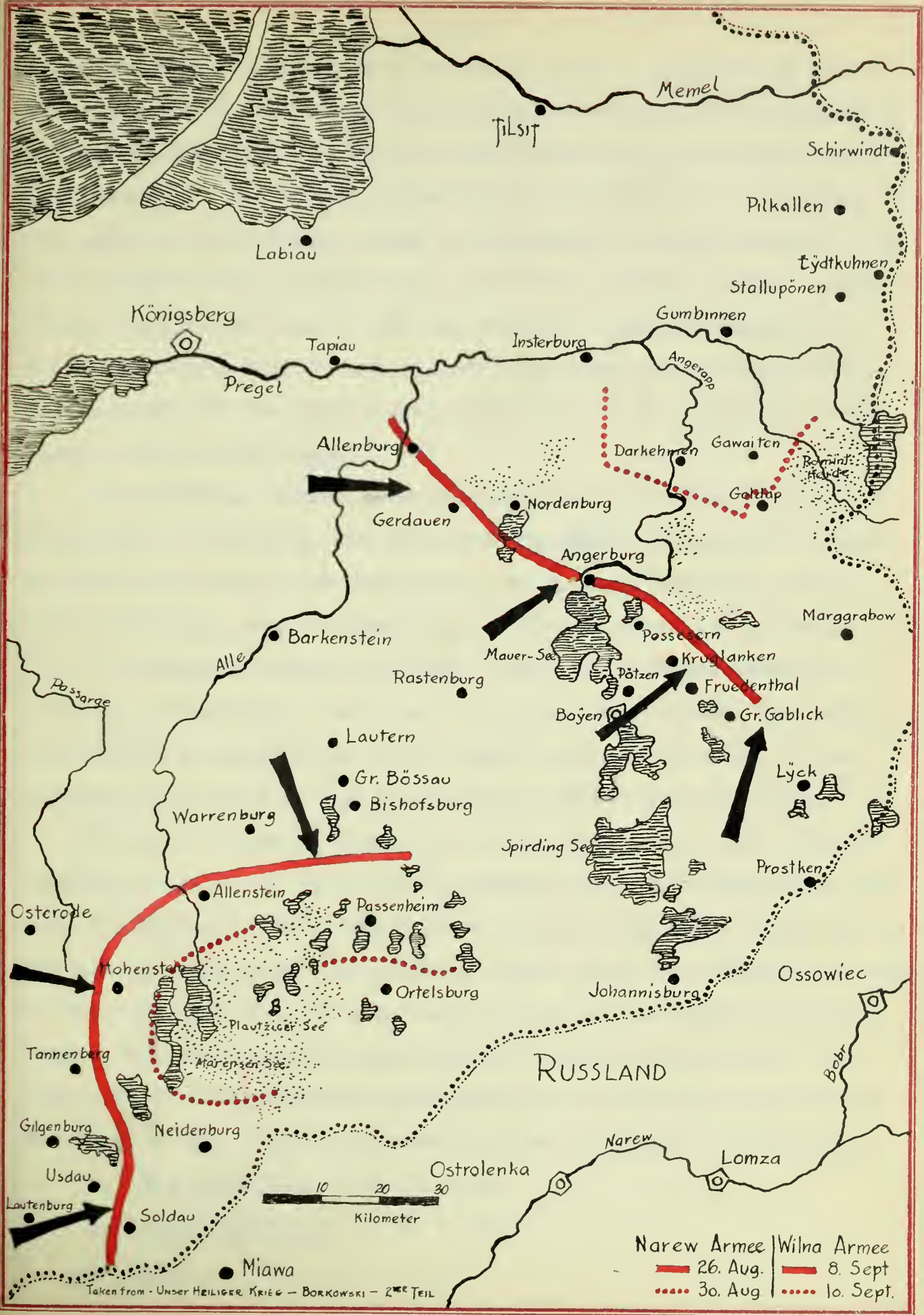
4. Quoted from The Great War, V. 3, pp. 132-133.

Both the Battle of Cannae and the notable contest which will presently be described were victories of nimbleness and dexterity against stolid, unintelligent foes. In each case the more talented commander enveloped and hopelessly ensnared his opponent. Hannibal led 50,000 men against the 70,000 Romans. The Germans claim to have won the no less complete victory in East Prussia against similar odds, while the Russians assert that the Germans were numerically superior. Although the Russians were numerically superior, yet they were scattered, while Hindenburg could maintain a local superiority by means of his strategic railways. At Cannae, Hannibal drew up his inferior troops in the center of the battle-line, and placed the dependable troops of his army in compact array on the wings which overlapped the Roman front. The weaker Carthaginian center received the shock of the Roman onslaught and yielded ground before it, but without breaking, until the wings were in position on the Roman flanks. Then, when the squadrons of Numidian cavalry had enclosed the Roman rear, the essential maneuvers were accomplished. The Romans were completely surrounded, ^{and} compressed into a congested position, where they were unable to deploy and make their numbers count. The closer they were crowded together the more unwieldy became their efforts and the more deadly the action of the enemy. What followed was not a battle, it was simply a slaughter!²

It seems that Hindenburg employed somewhat the same tactics as the victor of Cannae, the double turning movement for the envelope-

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 133.

2. Quoted from The Great War, V. 3, p. 133-134. See also Niemen, Hindenburg's Siege bei Tannenberg and Angerburg. A good description of the battle of Cannae is given by Herr Niemen, who likewise compares the battle of Tannenberg to Cannae.



ment, and then the destruction of his opponent. The natural conditions and means at his disposal permitted Hindenburg to economize in the use of his force, as compared with Hannibal, in two very important respects. The almost impenetrable character of the territory in the rear of the Russians served as effectually as the Numidian cavalry to complete the hostile ring, while the excellent railway communications across the rear of his own position enabled Hindenburg to shift his forces quickly and secretly and thus use the same troops successively for the culminating operations of the conflict in different parts of the field.¹

Strong German forces were advanced from the north on the line Allenstein, Wartenburg, and Bischofsburg--which succeeded in advancing their left wing past Passenheim, so that the Russians, after bitter fighting, were forced out of their positions to the south-east into the Masurian swamps and lakes. With the enormous stretch of varying surroundings, now forest, now lake, and between them meadows and fields, a consolidated front could not be maintained. It even happened that parts of the Russian army fought with each other.²

The most important operation in the whole battle was the surrounding of the left wing of the Russians and the forcing of it away from the border.³ This task fell to the 1st Army Corps which formed the German right wing. An official report gives the following account of the part that the 1st Army Corps played in the battle of Tannenberg: "The 1st Army Corps was called from the battlefield of Gumbinnen to lead the decisive blow against the left flank and rear of the Russian army which was advancing from the Narev. The soldiers

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 135.

2. Der Völkerring, V. 2, p. 50.

3. Ibid., p. 50.

had to be started on the night march as soon as they arrived by train. After a strenuous march the corps established contact with the advance guard of the enemy on August 26--a sultry late summer day--and kept forcing them back to the east until night fall.

"The next day the decisive fighting was to be done in the large battle which had been given the name of Tannenberg. At Wessolowen and Usdau (south of Gilgenburg) the 1st Russian army corps, which was being continually reinforced by parts of the Warsaw guard division by way of Soldau, obstructed the way to the rear of the hostile army. The enemy had entrenched himself strongly in a favorable position. By hard, bloody, forest battles the right wing of the corps gained step by step in the vicinity of Wessolowen. At 11 A. M. the village of Usdau was taken by storm, and its garrison the old Russian regiment from Wiborg was taken after a brave resistance. With heavy losses the enemy retreated towards Soldau in the direction of Neidenburg. Thus the flank of the Narev Army was subjected to the annihilating advance of the 1st Army Corps."¹

On the 28th of August a part of the 1st Army Corps followed the retreating enemy to Soldau, while the remainder began the ruthless pursuit which blocked the way of the main Narev army to Poland. The corps pressed forward thru Neidenburg along the great highways to Willenburg, although it encountered fierce resistance, especially in the forests. On the morning of August 30, the mighty ring around the 13th, 15th, and 23d Russian army corps had just been formed.² Distributing their heavy guns as they chose, the Germans poured their shells into the congested masses of Russians who were floundering

1. Quoted from Der Völkerring, V. 2, pp. 50-53.

2. Ibid., p. 53.

hopelessly in the swamps or staggering confusedly thru the forests.¹

It seems at first sight incredible that anything but a very superior army could surround another so effectively.² The achievement is, however, by no means impossible in these conditions even with a numerically inferior force. Hindenburg was able, as it were, to multiply his forces, partly by his foresight in providing motor transport, and partly by his skill in maneuvering to secure the roads.³ His minute knowledge of the topography of the district enabled him, moreover, so to utilize the swamps and lakes that he need hold only the solid intervals between them; while the unlucky Russians, ignorant of the country, lost entire batteries in the marshes, and were drowned as often as they were shot.⁴ By the 30th, whole battalions and even regiments were laying down their arms, and the only question was how many could escape by the only road left open to them, via "Örtelsburg and Johannsburg."⁵ On the 31st, in a last effort to rally his men and organize the retreat, Samsonoff, who had borne himself amidst the disaster with steadfast gallantry, rode with his Staff into a fire swept zone. "My place is with my men," was his answer to remonstrances.⁶ He was examining a map, when a shell burst in the midst of his Staff. It killed him on the spot, and with him General

1. The Great War, V. 3, p. 138.

2. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 235.

3. Ibid., p. 235.

4. Ibid., p. 235.

5. Ibid., p. 235. See Der Völkerring, V. 2, pp. 53-56. An eye witness states that as many as 20,000 Russians surrendered in one place.

6. Ibid., p. 236.

Pestitch, his Chief of Staff, and several junior officers.¹ Samson-off's personal reputation suffered nothing in this defeat, and Russian opinion inclined rather to blame his colleague, General Zhilinsky, for the disaster.² General Martos, a corps commander, was captured as he sought to escape from the field of battle.³

On the 29th the German Staff issued the following short report: "Our troops in East Prussia under the command of Colonel General Hindenburg have defeated, after three days fighting near Tannenberg, Hohenstein and Örtelsburg, the Russian Narev Army, consisting of five army corps and three cavalry divisions, and are now pursuing it across the borders."⁴

On the next day, the 30th, von Hindenburg was given the chief command in the East, and was presented with the Iron Cross of the first class by the Kaiser.⁵

The Germans claim to have taken 90,000 unwounded prisoners, and 30,000 wounded prisoners, besides 400 guns and an enormous amount of equipment of all kinds. They estimate the number of Russian dead at about 40,000, and their own losses at about 10,000--15,000.⁶ If their claims be correct, only about 70,000 out of 250,000 Russians escaped that awful carnage.

The Germans have chosen to call this memorable contest the Battle of Tannenberg for purely historic reasons. East Prussia had always been the cradle and stronghold of the Prussian autocracy.

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 236.

2. Ibid., p. 236.

3. See Hindenburg, Gegen Die Russian, p. 44.

4. Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, p. 36.

5. Ibid., p. 36.

6. Nieman, Hindenburg's Siege bei Tannenberg und Angerburg, p. 17.

Consequently their pride received an awful blow, when their champions, the Order of the Teutonic Knights, were defeated by the united Slavs in the great battle of Tannenberg on July 15, 1410.¹ The conflict remains a landmark in the eternal struggle of Teuton and Slav. It fills a prominent though mournful page in German history. When Prince Bulow, in his retirement, wrote his famous book on "Imperial Germany," he could still refer with regret to the "black day of Tannenberg."² Therefore the news of Hindenburg's triumph seemed to efface a bitter memory, and to compensate for the grief of 500 years.³

As soon as von Hindenburg had disposed of Samsonoff's Army, he hurried forward, scarcely allowing his soldiers any respite, for the purpose of dealing with Rennenkampf's Army. Instead of pushing forward or hastening to unite with Samsonoff, Rennenkampf, grown suddenly cautious, had begun to intrench himself on a line running from Lake Mauer to Tapiau, where his army faced in the direction whence Hindenburg's attack was naturally expected.⁴ The Vilna Army, drawn up in a generally concentric position covering the entire north-eastern part of the province, presented far too extensive a front for the immediate application of the supreme double turning maneuver.⁵ Hindenburg hoped to turn the Russian left wing, and repeat his Tannenberg tactics.⁶

On the anniversary of Sedan day (September 2) Hindenburg issued the following order to the troops. "Soldiers of the 8th Army! The

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 205.

2. Ibid., p. 205.

3. Ibid., p. 207.

4. The Great War, V. 3, p. 141.

5. Ibid., p. 141.

6. Nieman, Hindenburg's Siege bei Tannenberg und Angerburg, p. 18

many days of strenuous battle on the wide fields between Allenstein and Neidenburg are over. You have won a crushing victory over five army corps and three cavalry divisions. More than 60,000 prisoners and innumerable guns, machine guns, several standards, and a great deal of war material are in our hands. The remnants of the conquered army are fleeing over the border. The Vilna Army has begun the retreat from Königsberg. Next to God this glittering success is due to your joy, and sacrifice, unexcelled endurance, and bravery. I hope to be able to give you a few days of earned rest. Then we will go forth with fresh energy. With God, for Kaiser, King and Fatherland, until the last Russian has left our precious, sorely tried provinces, and we have carried the ever victorious banners into the enemy's country! Long live his Majesty the Kaiser and King!"¹

Hindenburg, however, did not pause for rest or reorganization. He tried to get at Rennenkampf's rear and intercept his retreat, but the maneuver failed. However Rennenkampf narrowly escaped Samsonoff's fate. While the Narev Army was wasting away in the iron grasp of Hindenburg, Rennenkampf with his army sat quietly in Insterburg--for almost three weeks, apparently without concerning himself about Samsonoff, certainly without hurrying to his assistance, although Rennenkampf's position was becoming more and more precarious.² Max Behrmann, the war reporter of the "Frankfurter Zeitung", writes.³ "What could cause Rennenkampf to avoid the few days marching that separated his troops from those of Samsonoff? It is generally believed that Rennenkampf considered Samsonoff's troops sufficiently strong to defy Hindenburg. Rennenkampf should have assumed however,

1. Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 53.

3. Ibid., p. 53.

that a timely reinforcement to Samsonoff would have been a welcome addition to his forces. But it might not be military but personal motives which caused Rennenkampf to watch quietly while Samsonoff was bleeding to death. These possible motives can be rightly understood only by one who knows Russia and Russian military conditions. Samsonoff's laurels--if one may speak of such at all--were already disturbing Rennenkampf's peace of mind in the Manchurian campaign: Samsonoff was undoubtedly one of the very few truly gifted and seriously Russian leaders, while Rennenkampf was and remained merely a general of cavalry. But an uncontrollable ambition rules this man, and so he could by no means be indifferent as to whether or how Samsonoff would get on. I am convinced that the commander of the Vilna army received the report of Samsonoff's destruction with a grim smile."¹ Of course it is also possible that Rennenkampf really underestimated the strength of Samsonoff's foe, and regarded the battles merely as a continuation of the skirmishes on the retreat.

Rennenkampf's position at the beginning of the battle was as follows: His right wing stood in the vicinity of Allenburg, the left extended along the Masurian Lakes at Angerburg, while the largest mass of troops was formed in the protruding obtuse angle at Gerdauen. Informed by excellent air service of this situation, the Germans sent a strong force against Gerdauen, and at the same time, the whole for-

1. This report should not be taken too seriously. Of course Rennenkampf may have had personal motives for not coming to the aid of his sorely-pressed colleague; yet the statement must be viewed critically until further proof is to be had. It must be remembered that Rennenkampf was removed from active command by Duke Nicholas in August, 1914, for incompetence, and has been looked upon with disfavor by the revolutionists of March, 1917.

ward line was attacked. Simultaneously German cavalry and other troops went thru between the lakes, and surrounded the left wing of the enemy. Thus Rennenkampf became aware that his left wing, which he deemed completely protected by the lakes, was in danger of being cut off. And, since in the meantime, his front positions were shattered, he decided to retreat along the only possible line, that of Insterburg-Gumbinnen-Stallupönen.¹

In a war report on the last battles in East Prussia, the "Berliner Lokalanzeiger" says: "The Russians withdrew in two divisions across the borders of the province, the main troops hurrying toward the north, and smaller parties toward the east. The Russian right wing, which had begun to retreat in time, seems to have kept fairly good order, but the left wing, according to all reports, showed the character of a disorderly flight. Major General Ludendorff strained to the last breath every man and horse in pursuit."²

On September 15, Hindenburg issued the following order to his troops: "Soldiers of the Eighth Army! You have won new laurels for your banners. In a two days battle on the Masurian Lakes, in a pursuit lasting several days thru Litau far across the Russian border, you have not only defeated, but annihilate^d the last of the two hostile armies that had invaded East Prussia,--the Vilna Army composed of the 2d, 3d, 4th, 20th, and 22th corps, the 1st, and 5th artillery brigades, the 52d, 54th, 56th, 57th, 72d, and 76th reserve divisions,

1. Quoted from Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, pp. 53-55. See also Nie-
man, Hindenburg's Siege bei Tannenberg und Angerburg, pp. 19-21.

2. Ibid., p. 57. This report also states that the Grand Duke Nicholas and Rennenkampf escaped in civilian attire. It is hardly plausible that the Grand Duke was in East Prussia, when he was conducting the victorious Galician operations.

Note 4 continued.

will be compelled to encounter an antagonist strengthened and rendered wiser by the experience of preceding battles. On the banks of the Niemen and the Rhine is the tomb of presumptuous military Germanism. With these words, let us hope, will begin a new page in the history of the cultured German nation."

and the 1st and 2d cavalry brigades. So far several standards, about 30,000 unwounded prisoners, at least 150 guns, many machine guns, munition trains and countless vehicles have been collected on the extensive battlefields. This is to be accredited to your zealous fighting, your unparalleled endurance in marching, and your bravery. Give God the honor! He will also be with us in the future. Long live his Majesty the King!"¹

East Prussia was now entirely cleared of the enemy and the Germans advanced into Russian territory, occupying Suwalki, where they set up a German administration.² The president of Münster, Count von Meervelde was appointed as the chief civilian authority over the conquered portion of East Prussia.³ General von Morgan issued the following proclamation in Poland. "To the inhabitants of Lomza and Warsaw! The Russian Narev Army has been destroyed and the Vilna Army under General Rennenkampf is in retreat; the Austro-Hungarian Armies are advancing victoriously from Galicia, the French and English have been decisively defeated in France, and Belgium has come under German rule. I come with my corps as a forerunner of other German armies and as a friend to you! Rise up with me and help drive the Russian barbarians who enslaved you out of your beautiful land, which shall

1. Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, pp. 38-39. In a captured gun carriage was found a hundred pieces of newly coined copper coins, which had the picture of the Czar on one side, and on the other the inscription (Einzug in Berlin 1914). The report continues and states that the Russians were so confident that a flag day was decreed by the Czar in Petrograd, and the proceeds, amounting to 50,000 roubles, were to be given to the first Russian soldier who should reach Berlin!

2. The Great War, V. 3, p. 143.

3. Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, p. 71.

again receive its political and religious liberty. That is the will of my mighty and gracious Emperor. My troops have been instructed to treat you as friends. We will pay for what you furnish us. I expect that you will receive us like allies."¹ The German control of the city of Suwalki and the province began immediately in an energetic manner. The firemen served as policemen, and a provisional city government of citizens was established. The value of the rouble was established at one mark, forty pfennigs, and the payment of all private property was guaranteed.²

General von Hindenburg achieved a brilliant victory, though his underestimation of the enemy was destined to cost him dear. The obscure, retired soldier had become in a short three weeks the idol of the German people, and the Kaiser confirmed their estimate by making him a Field Marshal and entrusting him with the supreme command of all the German forces in the East.³

The dashing Russian invasion of East Prussia had failed, and had cost the loss of an army.⁴ It is probably a mistake to suppose that

1. Der Völkerring, V. 2, p. 71.

2. Ibid., pp. 71-72.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 237.

4. Quoted from The London Times, September 28, 1914, 7 b. The Army Messenger, in an article headed, "From The Seine To Niemen," comments on the Russian retreat from East Prussia. It says: "Our advance in East Prussia was only a demonstration. It is necessary to remember this. True it cost us pretty dear, but our foes did not escape any more cheaply. From the enemy's allied forces has been withdrawn a strength which, who knows? might have cleared the road for the German Kaiser's dinner at Paris. With thinned ranks it is now necessary for the Germans to begin over again. More than that, they

it caused any direct and immediate transference of troops from France to East Prussia. But without a doubt it did indirectly contribute to relieve the pressure on the Western front. It demonstrated the power of the Russians to assume an early offensive and forced the Germans to provide against its renewal. It led the Germans to regard the whole Eastern front with a new anxiety and interest. It was a starting point in adventure after adventure, in which they hurled their forces on Warsaw, wasting their resources in the process. "It was a shrewd blow from the left against a boxer whose whole attention had been directed to his right. It forced him at length to direct his energies to both fronts, and to meet the offensive by a counter-offensive. It was at once a challenge and a temptation."¹

The sequel of Hindenburg's East Prussian campaign was destined to tarnish his glory, and restore the prestige of the Russian Armies. Hindenburg, who believed that Rennenkampf's big army had "not merely been defeated, but shattered," left the actual conduct of operations to General von Morgan, who had served under him at Tannenberg.² Rennenkampf, however, saved the greater portion of his army, and reached the circle of fortresses of Kovno, Grodno and Bjalostok, where it was completed by reserve formations. Men and war materials were both lacking for an energetic German invasion against the fortified Narev-Bug lines. Nevertheless in order to protect East Prussia from further outrages of war, it was necessary to proceed against the fortress of Osowice, which controlled the shortest road to Lyck.³

The Vilna Army was reorganized behind the fortresses on the Narev, and was again very formidable. It had moreover, gained in

1. Quoted from The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 237.

2. Ibid., p. 237.

3. Der Völkerring, V. 2, p. 205.

leadership, for General Ruszky, the victor of Lemberg, a brilliant scientific soldier, had been detached to command the defence.¹ The Germans were now at a disadvantage, for they no longer had their strategic railways at their disposal. The Germans discovered to their dismay, that only a few of the better main roads were practicable for their heavy motor transport. Most of the roads were nothing but beaten tracks, which had never been macadamized, and became in a wet autumn impassable sloughs of heavy mud.² To add to the misfortunes of the invaders, it rained heavily for three days, from September 27-30, the critical period of the fighting.³

The war correspondent of the "Berliner Tageblatt" writes about these battles as follows:- "Our troops are in continual motion and suffer from bad weather and privations. Nothing would be more erroneous than to believe that we are penetrating deep into Russia with hurra and huzza, driving the enemy before us, until we make ourselves at home in St. Petersburg and Warsaw. On the contrary, it is possible, yes probable, that here and there we must turn back from the courageous and successful offensive to defensive positions, until we also receive reinforcements, and are able to fill the gaps made by the month-long battles....."⁴

The Russian defences were formed primarily by two rivers, the Niemen and the Bobr. The latter is an inconsiderable stream, and of no great width, but it is twelve feet deep, and it runs thru a swampy valley of immense and impassable marshes.⁵ Across these

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 237.

2. Ibid., p. 237.

3. Ibid., p. 238.

4. Der Völkerring, V. 2, p. 205.

5. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 238.

marshes there is only one good passage, the high road and railway from Lyck thru Grajewo to Bialystok. The crossing is defended by the little town of Osowice, which ranks as a third class fortress.¹ It has solid concrete forts, and these were provided at the outbreak of war, with a new type of heavy gun, whose performance surprised the Germans. The bombardment began on September 27, and lasted for four days, but little damage was done to the solid walls. The seventeen inch howitzers made their usual appearance in the newspaper accounts of these operations, but the probability is that the largest guns used were the more generally serviceable Austrian pieces, on motor carriages.² The guns were pushed up to within five miles of the fortress, and the infantry lines were never nearer than four miles. The last episode of the siege was a brilliant sortie by the garrison. Bodies of infantry, by following paths over the swamps known only to inhabitants, contrived to get behind the advanced German lines, both from left and right. Another body charged up the causeway, and before the Germans had recovered from their surprise, contrived to capture three guns while the rest went hurridly northwards.³ The Germans seeing the hopelessness of taking Osowice, discontinued the siege on October 1.⁴ It was abandoned not merely because Osowice had proved to be unexpectedly obstinate, but also because the larger German operations against the Niemen had meanwhile failed even more hopelessly.⁵

The object of the Germans was to cross the Niemen and cut the

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 238.

2. Ibid., p. 238.

3. Ibid., p. 238.

4. Der Völkerkrieg, V. 2, p. 205.

5. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 238.

Russian line of communications. The object of General Ruzsky was not merely to repel them from the Niemen, but to drive them back to their own frontier, and to disorganize their communications by seizing the little town of Augustowo, a place of no intrinsic importance, but vital because it is the point at which several of the few good roads of this region cross.¹ The chief physical feature of this region is the immense forest, thirty miles long, and twenty miles wide, on whose western edge Augustowo is situated. Intricate chains of lakes stretch on either side of the road from Suwalki to Seiny, begin again south-east of Seiny, and are found on either side of the road from Surino to the Niemen.² This country reminds one of the Masurian lake region. Above all, the Niemen itself is a formidable obstacle. It is more than 200 yards wide; it is too deep to ford, and bridges exist only at Grodno and Olita, both of these being fortified places.³ The defence had a further advantage. The right bank, which the Russians held, was high, and in some places might almost be called a cliff. The left bank, on which the Germans had to operate, was low, and, what was worse, it was swampy in most places.⁴

The attempt to cross the Niemen was made simultaneously at two points. The most northern of these was at Druskeniki, about twenty-seven miles north of Grodno. Here the Germans constructed a pontoon bridge and endeavored to cross the river. The Russians held their fire until the bridge was full of men.⁵ Then it was swept clean by the artillery. The German guns opened fire, and a long artillery

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 238.

2. Ibid., p. 239.

3. Ibid., p. 239.

4. Ibid., p. 239.

5. Ibid., p. 239.

duel ensued. Thinking that the Russian guns were silenced, the German infantry again crowded over the bridge. They met the same fate as their predecessors, and it was said that thousands of German corpses floated down the stream.¹ The other attempt was made near Grodno, and here again the Germans were repulsed with slaughter in their vain attempts to cross the river.

The fighting round about Augustowo Forest was of the most bitter character the Germans desperately contesting the western approaches in order to cover their line of retreat.² The Russians made a flanking movement towards the south, and soon forced the Germans into retreat, which at times seemed to have the character of a disorderly flight.³ The stroke at Augustowo was well planned, and the whole series of operations was managed with a skill worth of the reputation which General Ruszky had won in Galicia.⁴ A week of hard fighting and hard marching sufficed to hurl the invaders back to their own country, their glory not a little diminished and their numbers reduced.⁵

The German invasion from East Prussia had failed, somewhat ingloriously, and Russian prestige was enhanced by their recent victory.

1. For a description of this battle, see an account by an eyewitness in Stephen Graham, Russia And The World, p. 63.

2. The London Times, October 5, 1914, 9 f.

3. The London Times claims a great victory, but the Germans deny the claim. See Der Völkerring, V. 2, pp. 205-6, and Borkowski, Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, pp. 200-201. The Germans report that Japanese artillery took a prominent part in the operations around Augustowo and Suwalki.

4. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 240.

5. Ibid., p. 240.

The Germans retired to their own country, followed by the Russians. A pause of comparative inaction ensued after the battle of Augustowo. The Germans now concentrated their attacks around Warsaw, with the result that quiet reigned for some time in the East Prussian theatre of war. The two sides "dug themselves in," and both adopted a policy of "watchful waiting."

Chapter III.

The Second Invasion Of East Prussia.

Thruout October and the early days of November, the Russians and the Germans faced each other in intrenched positions, which followed approximately the line of the frontier.¹ The Germans attacked the Russian trenches habitually, but they evidently had no thought of advancing. The real fighting on the Eastern Front, was in a different theatre, in Poland. Thither Hindenburg transferred most of his troops for an advance on Warsaw, and, for the next few months, his whole attention was concentrated there. Consequently the forces in East Prussia were inferior to those of the Russians, who advanced slowly but surely. On November 14, they reached Stallupönen.² Early in December, the Russians were slowly penetrating the Maze of the Masurian Lakes, which was the ne plus ultra for Russia.³ These operations were in the main, a war of trenches, for neither side could spare large forces on this front.

On January 1st, the Russians stood on the eastern edge of East Prussia, along the line of the Angerapp and of the great Masurian lakes, and on the southern edge more or less along the frontier up to

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 3, p. 240.

2. See Der Völkerring, V. 4, p. 117. The Germans claim to have defeated the Russians all along the line, and to have taken numerous prisoners. At Stallupönen they claim to have taken 500 prisoners, and north of Wyztyter Lakes, 4000 prisoners and 10 machine guns.

3. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 6, p. 25.

Mlawa.¹ It is of importance to know that frost is a great factor for military operations in the East Prussian theatre of war, just as water forms the chief obstacles on both sides.

There was a lull in the fighting in the East Prussian theatre of war during the first three weeks of January, due to the bad weather. In the first few days of January the weather was so mild that even small streams, as the Rawka--were free from ice; the whole of Poland was one vast quagmire. Before the middle of January began a succession of alternate spells of cold weather and thaws. It was only after January 20 that prolonged cold weather set in thruout the whole Eastern theatre of war, and that for the first time a winter campaign based on "ice and snow" could be contemplated.²

During the last few days of January and the first of February, the Germans made a desperate attempt to reach Warsaw, but were repulsed with great loss.³ Since Hindenburg could not take Warsaw, he had to prospect elsewhere. His next attempt must be a surprise, delivered where the elements of surprise existed--that is, with the German system of railways behind it, and not the half-dozen botched and cobbled Polish lines. The new theatre must clearly be East Prussia, where the Russian movements were growing audacious and intolerable.⁴ This was to be Hindenburg's culminating effort, and if it succeeded, the communication between Warsaw and Petrograd would be cut, the line of the Niemen and Narev taken, and the Polish capital must fall.⁵ But let us first follow the fortunes of the Russians.

1. The Times History Of The War, V. 4, p. 168.

2. Ibid., pp. 168-9.

3. The Independent, February 22, 1915, p. 267.

4. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 6, p. 18.

5. Ibid., p. 19.

When, about the end of January, the Grand Duke Nicholas, in deference to the wishes of the Allies in the West, made a forward movement in East Prussia, the force used was the 10th Army of four corps, commanded by General Baron Sievers.¹ The German Army in East Prussia was small at the moment, probably not more than three corps strong. Most of it was Landwehr and Landsturm, and the first line elements seem to have been supplemented by portions of the 1st and 20th corps.² The Russians advanced at a fast rate, in spite of bad weather, and by January 23 they began to threaten the German positions at Lipno.³ North of the line of the Masurian lakes the progress of the Russian forces was most marked round Darkehnen, to the west of Pilkallen, and south-east of Tilsit, in the valleys of the Szeszuppe and of the Inster. Along their upper courses the banks of these rivers are wooded and marshy, farther west their banks rise and offer an easier field for a military advance.⁴ Towards the end of January the marshes which shelter the positions around Insterburg were frozen. Could the Russians taking advantage of the season, have pushed across this barrier, a dangerous flank attack might have been carried out against the German positions that extended along the line of the Angerapp and of the big lakes.⁵

On the 7th of February the surprise which von Hindenburg had prepared was sprung upon the invaders. He had brought from the West the 21st Corps, and three reserve corps; from Germany he had got the 38th and 40th Corps, which were new formations; he had borrowed the

1. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 6, p. 25.

2. Ibid., p. 25.

3. The Times History Of The War, V. 4, p. 186.

4. Ibid., p. 187.

5. Ibid., p. 187.

equivalent of three corps from other parts of the Eastern front, including the better part of the Silesian Landwehr Corps, and a reserve corps of the guard.¹ He had thus accumulated a total force of nine corps--about 300,000 men--to hurl upon General Siever's force, which the Germans estimated at about 220,000 men, and the English at about 120,000.²

The second battle of the Masurian lakes was a repetition of Hindenburg's Tannenberg tactics (the enveloping movement.) Since details of the battle are lacking, the following extract from the German War Report will give a vivid description of the nine days battle in Masuria, called by Borkowski, a Räderwerk, or wheelwork of battles.³

The report follows:- "By the beginning of February 1915, the time had finally come when fresh German forces were available, to be brought to the East Prussian theatre of war, for an encircling movement against the Russians. The object of the operation was the clearing out of the Russian invader from German territory. Although hidden by the German fortifications and by German border troops, the concentration of the troops for the offence took place behind the German wings during the first part of February. On the seventh of February 1915, the southern wing began the attack. A little later,

1. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 6, p. 26.

2. Ibid., p. 26. This statement does not agree with the German report, which declared the Russian forces to be 220,000 strong, and the German forces at 250,000. It seems that there has been either a deliberate attempt to underestimate the strength of the Russian forces, on the part of the English, or an exaggeration on the part of the Germans. See Borkowski, Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, p. 224.

3. Borkowski, Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, p. 228.

the northern group (from the Tilsit region) began its movement. The ground was thickly covered with snow and frozen, and all the lakes were covered with thick ice. Besides, an extraordinary snowfall had fallen on the fifth of February, and the strong winds had formed tremendous snowdrifts in many places, which hampered all communications by rail and road, and rendered all motor traffic impossible.

"The German leaders however, had provided well for the difficulties of a winter campaign. The troops were dressed warmly, and thousands of sleds were provided. In order to get at the main forces of the enemy, the German Southern wing had first to cross the forty kilometer forest zone of Johannsburg woods and the Pisseck. The enemy had made numerous barriers and fortified the crossings of the Pisseck. In Johannsburg and Bialla stronger Russian forces were encamped there. In one of the positions occupied by the enemy, a dance was announced for Sunday evening, when just at this time, the German offensive began, completely surprising both the troops and the leaders.

"In all quietness the German columns broke thru their barriers and in the afternoon they came in touch with the enemy. The young troops of General Litzmann forced their way across the Pisseck at Wrobeln during the afternoon and night of February 8, 1915. In spite of snowed up roads and heavy snowdrifts which persisted all day, and greatly impeded the operations, these troops traversed forty kilometers. The veteran troops of General von Falck came as far as Johannsburg and took Snopken by storm, whereby two officers and 450 men, and two machine guns were captured. On the next day, the German troops continued the battle. The southern column of General Litzmann was already on the point of surprising the southern river bank near Gehsen, where it was suddenly attacked on its right flank by

the enemy, who had advanced from Kolno. Immediately the Germans turned upon this adversary and threw him back from whence he came. Five hundred prisoners, five cannon, two machine guns, countless munition wagons, and other material remained in our hands, while on the same day, the neighboring column made 300 prisoners by Wrobeln and General Falck stormed Johannsburg, which was defended by two Russian regiments. Here the Russians lost 2500 prisoners, eight cannon and twelve machine guns. The Fikseck line was in the German possession on the eighth of February, and on the ninth, the advance on Lyck began.

"In the meantime the northern wing was not idle. It attempted to attack the fortified positions of the Russian right wing, which stretched from Spullen to Schorellen Forest, and from there right up to the Russian border. The ninth of February was selected for the attack against these positions, which were provided with charged wires. The position was taken and the enemy fled in a south-eastern direction. The Germans followed by forced marches, and compelled the Russians to retreat to previously fortified positions south of Wirballen. This position was stormed on the tenth of February, and much booty and a large number of prisoners were taken. By February 20, 1915, the Russians were driven away from East Prussia, which was now freed from the enemy-----" ¹

The Germans proclaimed this second victory of the Masurian Lakes as another Tannenberg. The German reports claim that the Russian losses were over 165,000, including more than 100,000 prisoners, and a great amount of booty, including 200 machine guns, and 300 cannon of

1. Quoted from Der Völkerrkrieg, V. 4, pp. 122-25.

various sizes.¹

Again the Germans pressed forward and made frantic efforts to get past the fortress of Osowice and cross the Niemen, but they had little success. Strong Russian forces were set in motion, and counter-attacked with such energy that the invaders were pushed back.² On March fifth, the serious attack on Osowice ended, and orders were issued for a gradual retreat to the East Prussian frontier.³

Hindenburg's two victories in the Masurian Lake Region were of the first magnitude. These victories not only enabled him to safeguard and make secure up to the present time the German territories in the east, but they menaced Warsaw and even Petrograd. To Hindenburg falls the honor of having taken the largest numbers of prisoners in history, in single operations, except at Metz and Paris in 1870.⁴ On the other hand, the Russians lost heavily in men and material, yet they were not obliged to lay down their arms and sue for peace. New armies were formed to combat the invader, and only when the Russians could no longer supply their armies in the field (May-September, 1915) did the Germans force them into retreat past Warsaw. In spite of their heavy losses the Russians are very formidable and are not to be despised, if General Brussiloff's Galician campaign in 1916 is any

1. Borkowski, Unser Heiliger Krieg, V. 2, p. 229. The Russians claim that the German reports are fictitious, and affirm that they lost only 30,000 men and about 80 guns. See the Times History Of The War, V. 4, p. 190, and Nelson's History Of The War, V. 6, p. 29.

2. Nelson's History Of The War, V. 6, p. 32.

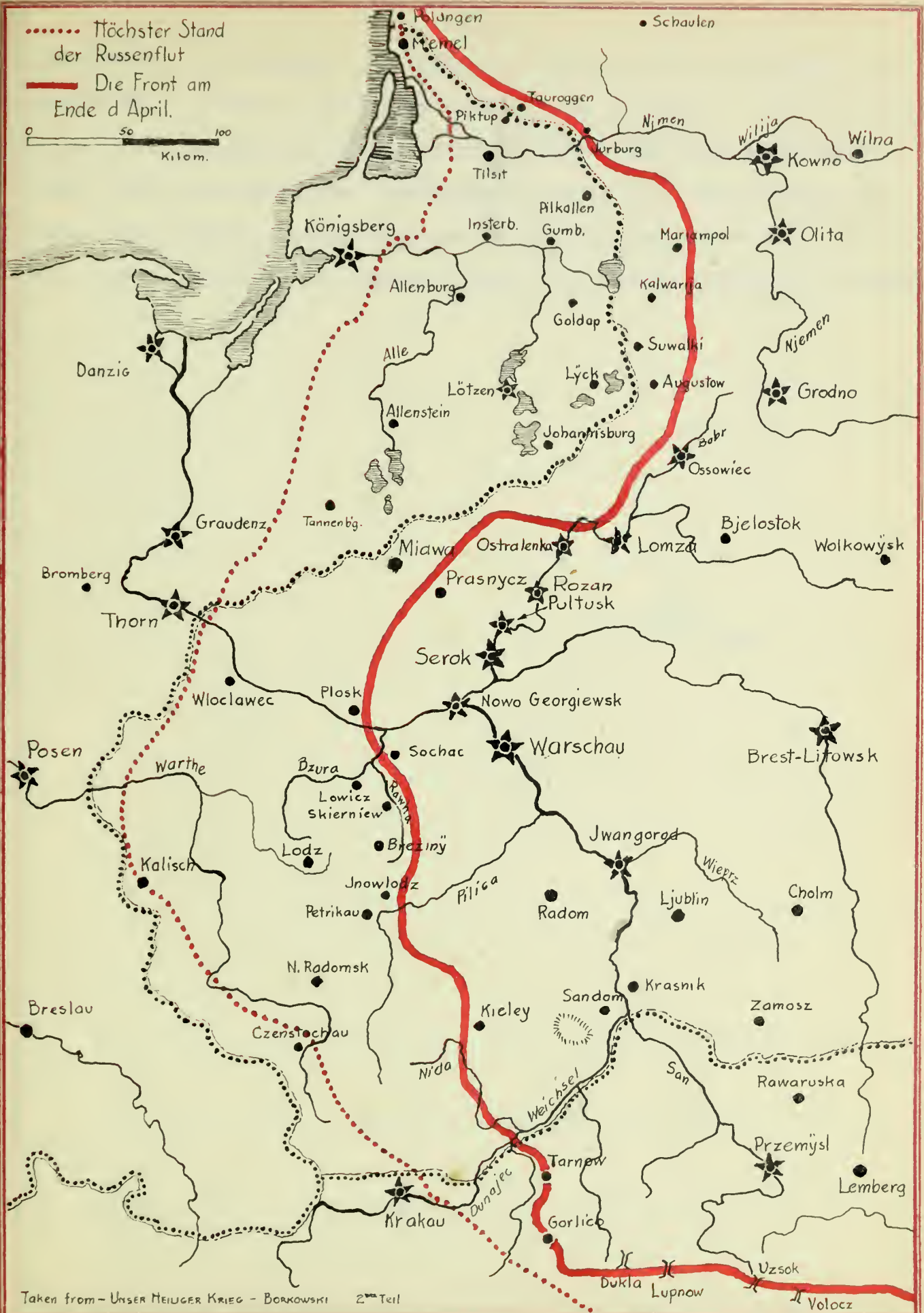
3. Ibid., p. 32.

4. This statement may need to be qualified, since General Brussiloff captured almost 500,000 Austrians and thousands of guns in his Galician campaign in June-August, 1916.

..... Höchster Stand
der Russenflut

— Die Front am
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indication. The Russian revolution has changed the situation to an extent that cannot as yet be estimated with certainty. At the present moment the Germans are making every effort to conclude a separate peace with the provisional government, but so far, their peace overtures have failed, and it is hoped by the Entente Allies that Russia will rise and attack the common enemy with renewed strength and vigor.

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